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ABSTRACT

The role of the universities in economic and social development is merely one aspect of the contribution of education and knowledge to economic and social development. Economists fully realize that human resources development is a necessary condition for achieving economic and social progress. To economists the role of higher education in the promotion of economic and social development belongs to the field of economics of education, a field that together with wealth economics constitutes the rapidly growing branch of economics of human resources. The three basic functions of universities are in satisfying the needs of society for high-level manpower, undertaking scientific research, and assuming a leading role in the promotion of change in social values and institutions in the desired directions. Developing nations vary widely in supply, structure, and state of development of institutions of higher education available to them. Consequently, the content of what constitutes the particular policies that ought to be followed in a particular case will vary from one country to the next. However, no university will be able to fulfill the expected role in the promotion of economic and social development unless provided with facilities required for the proper performance of their functions.
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THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Universities fulfil their cardinal role in economic and social development by performing three basic functions. These functions are (1) the provision of the multitude of technical, professional and administative skills required for the initiation and the acceleration of the process of economic development, (2) fostering the establishment of such social values and attitudes as would promote economic and social progress, and (3) undertaking research on problems of economic and social development which in many cases take the form of vicious circles.

It is evident of course that universities have no monopoly in discharging these responsibilities in any country, developed or developing. Thus, while universities basically concentrate on satisfying the urgent needs of developing countries for high level manpower, the needs of the social economy are not limited to the skills of this category of manpower. There are no less urgent needs, and in some cases a much more urgent need for increasing the supply of the sub-professional categories which are produced by technical and vocational schools or receive their education through programmes of in-service training. On the other hand, the eradication of illiteracy, together with the improvement of the quality of primary education, constitutes one of the basic requirements of the sustained improvement of the quality of human resources in developing countries.

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Again, while universities should rightfully assume a leading role in the promotion of social values and behaviour patterns as are conducive to economic and social progress, other social institutions have no less significant role to play. Reference may be made to institutions belonging to earlier levels of formal education, political parties, mass information media, religious institutions as well as to the family itself.

Finally research activities are not limited to universities. As of late, developing countries have been active in the establishment of research institutes outside the realm of universities as well as in the institution of research departments within existing or newly established public bodies.

The participation of other educational, cultural and research institutions in the performance of the three basic functions of universities clearly suggests that the role of universities in economic and social development is merely one aspect of the contribution of education and knowledge to economic and social development. Hence, to economists the role of higher education in the promotion of economic and social development belongs to the field of economics of education, a field which together with health economics constitutes the rapidly growing branch of economics of human resources.(1)

This is not to say that universities do not have a distinct role to play among the multitude of educational, cultural and research institutions which co-exist in our present day society. What has been said is of the nature of a reminder that the contribution of universities to economic and social development cannot be treated in isolation from the contribution of education and the advancement of knowledge in general to economic and social development. In this connection, it is also worthwhile to emphasize that the effectiveness of universities in the discharge of their responsibilities in these respects depends upon the pursuit of an appropriate strategy of human resources development based on a well-balanced system of primary, secondary, university and professional education.

In recognition of the organic relationship between the activities of universities in the field of education and research and that of other

educational and research institutions, a word has to be said on the great importance that the development of human resources currently occupies in the literature on economic development. This will be followed by an analysis of the three basic functions performed by universities as well as of the policies that ought to be followed in their performance in developing countries with special reference to conditions prevailing in our African continent. Finally, as a writer with some experience in college administration, I cannot but conclude with a word on the resources and facilities that ought to be accorded to universities in order to ensure the effective discharge of these functions.

Economists have always been aware of the importance of human resources as a basic determinant of the economic future of nations. Adam Smith viewed the acquisition of skills specifically as an investment.[2] And while J.S. Mill insisted at one time that 'people of a country should not be looked upon as wealth because wealth existed only for the sake of people'[3], he laid great emphasis on education and the growth of knowledge as one of the main causes of superior productiveness.[4] Marshall emphasized the importance of education 'as a national investment' and expressed the opinion that 'the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings'[5]. To him, 'Ideas, whether those of art and science, or those embodied in practical appliances are the most 'real' of the gifts that each generation receives from its predecessors. The world's material wealth would quickly be replaced if it were destroyed, but the ideas by which it was made were retained. If however, the ideas were lost, but not the material wealth, then that would dwindle and the world would go back to poverty'[6]

It is true, however, that modern economists have not laid as much explicit emphasis on the contribution of the development of human resources to economic growth as did some of the great classical economists[7]. Mainly for methodological considerations, attention was focused on material capital. However, experience has conclusively demonstrated that the early postwar emphasis on investment on material capital in the methodology of economic planning was seriously misguided. As Johnson points out, 'economic

development depends vitally on the creation of a labour force both equipped with the necessary technical skills for modern industrial production and imbued with a philosophy conducive to the acceptance and promotion of economic and technical change'[8]. As Edith Penrose points out:[9]

> "A technological revolution lies at the heart of this network of interrelated changes that we call economic development; such a revolution is not brought about by the mere importation of factories and machines of various kinds from abroad and the forced expansion of capital formation in industry. It is a much more difficult and much deeper process, for it requires the development, not only of technical and administrative skills, but of institutional arrangements and social and intellectual attitudes that will enable the local population to adopt, and also creatively to adapt, modern technology in appropriate measure for their particular economy. After all, it is not the machines in themselves, or even the savings — cum — investment, that are responsible for the high living standards now attained by the developed countries it is ability, skills and economic behaviour of the people that have made possible the development and efficient use of these machines".

This new emphasis on the development of human resources is so definite that it has been looked upon as generating at least the beginnings of a revolution, or rather a counter-revolution, in modern economic thinking. Economists no longer view economic development as merely a matter of technological change and capital formation. They fully realize that human resources development is a necessary condition for achieving economic and social progress. And, as Harbison and Myers rightly point out 'if a country is unable to develop its human resources, it cannot develop much else, whether it be a modern political and social structure, a sense of national unity, or higher standards of material welfare'[10].

In any case, the explicit recognition of the role of education and knowledge in the process of economic development is not the only feature of the so-called revolution or counter-revolution in modern

economic thinking. It is now widely realized by economists that the economic factors affecting growth are shaped and affected by the formal social, political and economic institutions together with such basic forces as customs, values, modes of thought, attitudes and productive employment.

Some economists go even to question the relevance of the classical and other Western theories to the problems of contemporary underdeveloped countries 'where institutions and values differ so markedly from those of Western society'. And perhaps 'a more important reason for the inapplicability of Western growth theory lies in the fact that it does not treat change in institutions and values as a dynamic independent variable in the growth process'[12].

As recapitulated by Esman, Literature on economic development in the postwar period passed through several phases. At the outset, attention was focused on economic resources — savings, capital accumulation and the allocation of investment. A subordinate theme which has been receiving growing attention dealt with the development of human resources improving health, developing vocational, professional and administrative skills. Contemporaneously, however, 'there has been a growing recognition of the development process as a far-reaching culture change, as a societal transformation which affects fundamentally and often simultaneously every important aspect of community and individual behaviour. This later view of development comprehends political, social and ideological, as well as economic variables interacting in complex patterns'[13].

The three basic functions of universities were earlier summarized in satisfying the needs of society to high level manpower, undertaking scientific research and assuming a leading role in the promotion of change in social values and institutions in the desired directions. It is needless to point out that all three functions are interrelated Creative teaching is organically inter-related to research, and it is through teaching in the widest sense as well as research that universities are able to perform their leading role in promoting changes in values and institutions in desired directions. If for the sake of convenience, the three functions are treated separately, this should not in the least obscure their basic inter-dependence.

On the other hand, developing countries vary widely in the supply, structure and stage development of institutions of higher education available to them.

As a result, the nature of problems faced by universities of developing countries differs fundamentally from one country to another, and likewise the content of what constitutes the particular policies that ought to be followed in each particular case. And it is owing to this that my analysis of these functions had to be confined to generalities and my recommendations had to be limited to basic issues.

It had rightly been pointed out that developing countries need high level manpower just as urgently as they need capital.[14] The high salaries exacted by foreign high level manpower preclude large scale or continuous dependence on foreign personel, disregarding all other, and probably more weighty, considerations. Again, it could not be said that nationals could be educated at institutions of higher education abroad, since 'there are not going to be enough places in the colleges, universities and professional schools of the more highly developed countries to meet the needs of less developed countries for college trained manpower '[15].

The upshot is that most of the developing countries university graduates have to be trained at home, that is, it falls upon the shoulders of national universities to provide their countries with the bulk of urgently needed high level manpower. It is needless to emphasize, however, that it is not a matter of quantity, but also — and perhaps more significantly — a matter of vocational composition and of quality of graduates.

It is self-evident that the vocational distribution of graduates must correspond to the manpower needs of society. Unless such correspondence is maintained universities will fail in their duty to provide their countries with the particular skills required to accelerate the process of economic development. Again, it would be extremely difficult to justify investment in higher education if universities fail to relieve shortages suffered by their countries in particular professional skills, with the result of impeding the process of economic development by limiting the capacity of the country to

absorb capital. Finally, graduates of the kind for which there is little demand will not be guaranteed reasonable opportunities for productive employment.

As we all know, many developing countries are suffering from the lack of correspondence between the vocational distribution of graduates and the current requirements of their programmes of economic and social development for high level manpower. The imbalance usually take the form of the graduation of students from faculties of humanities, Law and Arts far in excess of the needs of society for their skills. The reasons for this are many and varied. However, as Harbison and Myers pointed out, a major reason for the over-expansion of these faculties 'is the fact that places for students in these fields are the cheapest to provide'(16)

Yet, whatever the reasons may be, the consequences of the over-expansion of these faculties should give rise to serious concern. In some countries, unemployment among graduates of faculties of humanities, law and arts has reached alarming proportions. In other countries the government took upon itself to provide graduates with employment, thus aggravating a state of disguised unemployment in both the government and public sectors. With emigration at best a palliative, it has been suggested that graduates in excess supply should be offered training courses in other fields for which there is greater demand. With all these remedies having the nature of stop-gap, or at best short-run, solutions, one cannot but insist that admission policies should closely correspond to the needs and requirements of economic and social development.

In our age of rapid change in ideas, technology and organization, the question of the quality of the students assumes overwhelming importance. Again, the type of problems facing developing countries expects in their high level manpower a high degree of academic excellence, creative ability and full awareness of the nature of problems encountered by their own countries.

It is needless to point out, however, that the quality of graduates depends on numerous variables, many of which lie outside the direct control of universities in many developing countries. Since this

subject will be touched upon in the last section of this paper, I will limit myself to drawing attention to such variables as the quality of secondary education, student-teacher ratios, quality of teaching staff, availabilities of teaching aids and university facilities, etc....

Be this as it may, the activities of universities in developing countries should not be limited to formal figher education. Universities have a no less important responsibility in organizing extension services, refresher courses as well as public lectures for wider audiences.

As previously noticed, teaching and research are interrelated. Unless research activities occupy a prominent place in university life, the quality of teaching is bound to suffer whether on the graduate or undergraduate level. Another consideration is that in many, if not most, developing countries, the bulk of high level manpower properly qualified for undertaking research belongs to the teaching staff of universities. Hence, unless universities were to shoulder their responsibilities in the field of research, research activities in the country as a whole should suffer both in quantity as well as quality. Thirdly, research on problems of social and economic development encountered by developing countries should not be left entirely to scholars belonging to advanced countries, since there is the danger that they would be influenced by conditions prevailing, or which had prevailed, in their own countries in analysing the process of social and economic development or in outlining the preconditions for rapid economic growth.(17)

In this connection, attention is usually focused on the question of priorities. Without underestimating the importance of basic research in various fields of scientific knowledge one would probably deny that the real challenge facing research workers in developing countries is 'to adapt scientific discoveries and innovations from the advanced countries to their own economies and industries'.(18)

Finally, a university would be negating its social responsibility if it declined to assume its leading role in promoting the dynamic change in values and institutions in desired directions. As Saiyidain aptly points out:(19)

'The social significance and purpose of the university must be sought in its quest for, and advocacy of, values. It must become the courageous spokesman of progressive values and an agency for outspoken, but reasoned, criticism of obscurantist social practices and reactionary or outmoded dogmas. This is a difficult, even a dangerous, responsibility which the universities are disinclined to take up.... Hence the need for defining more sharply the leadership role of the university, both at the social and the intellectual level — to act as the conscience of the community whatever the price'.

In the previous section, a short account was given of the basic functions of universities with special reference to developing countries. It is evident, however, that universities would not be expected to succeed in the proper performance of these functions unless they were properly endowed with such prerogatives and facilities as are equal to the level of desirable performance. Unfortunately conditions in this respect are far from satisfactory in many developing countries. Thus, Saiyidain summarizes in what follows, the main points of criticisms levelled at Indian universities:[2*]

'The most frequently repeated ciriticisms refer to the rapid increase in the number of colleges and universities particularly since 1947, the pressure on most of them to expand their enrolment beyond their existing capacity, the financial stringency which makes work conditions extremely unfavourable, lack of freedom to experiment and grow intellectually, the imperious knocking on the door by the new technical subjects which not only absorb a huge share of the meagre resources but also a majority of the best students. In addition the pressure of educated unemployment seems to justify, on a short-range view, the belief that the earning of livelihood is the most important purpose of education'.

It is needless to point out that these conditions are not confined to Indian universities and that many of us would frankly admit that much of this criticism applies to universities in our own as well as in a great number of developing countries. Refering to a group of such countries, Harbison touches on the most important issue of the

devotion of the teaching staff of an important part of their time to outside activities owing to the low levels of their salaries and the meagre research facilities put at their disposal. He says:[21]

> 'It is generally true that universities professors particularly in the humanities, arts, law and commerce devote very little of their time to teaching and research. Because of low salaries in the universities and great demand for educated manpower in the society, most university professors have several jobs. In some countries, they are felicitiously called 'taxi' professors because they spend their lives travelling from university class-rooms to government offices or commercial establishments. The poorly equipped laboratories and libraries give them little incentive for research. The simple truth is that the funds available to universities are sufficient only to provide cheap education. And if the countries in question must build and maintain a higher education system at bargain-basement prices, the part-time employment of well-qualified persons, even if they are taxi professors, is certainly justifiable'.

I do not wish to take more of your time in citing the difficulties encountered by universities in many parts of our third world. The point I wish to emphasize is that universities will not be able to fulfil the cardinal role expected of them in the promotion of economic and social development unless they were provided with facilities required for the proper performance of their functions. Only then will universities be able to raise themselves to the level of their responsibilities.

FOOTNOTES

(1) *Economics of Education* 1.M. Blaug, ed. Penguin Modern Economics Readings (Harmondsworth, Middle-sex, England: 1968) p. 7.

(2) M.J. Bowman, 'The Human Investment Revolution in Economic Thought' *Economics of Education* 1, op. cit. p. 104.

(3) T.W. Schultz 'Investment in Human Capital' *Economics of Education* 1; op. cit. p 14

(4) Lord Robbins, *The Theory of Economic Development in the History of Economic Thought* (London 1968) p. 93.

(5) As quoted in Frederick Harbison and Charles A. Myers, Education, Manpower and Economic Growth (New York 1964) p. 3

(6) As quoted in Robbins, *op. cit.* pp 93-94

(7) Cf. Harbison and Myers, *op. cit.* p 4

(8) H.G. Johnson 'Towards a Generalized Capital accumulation Approach to Economic Development' *Economics of Education* 1, op. cit. p 35

(9) *Edith T. Penrose, Economics and the Aspirations of Le Tiers Monde,* An Inaugural Lecture (London 1965) p. 7.

(10) *Op. cit.* p 13

(11) Bernard Okum & Richard W. Richardson, *Studies in Economic Development* (New York 1961) p. 334

(12) Ibid

(13) Milton J. Esman 'Insitution Building in National Development' *Dynamics of Development,* Gove Hambidge, ed. (New York 1964) p. 140

(14) Paul G. Hoffman as quoted in Harbison and Myers *op. cit* p. 16

(15) F. F. Hill "Education: Key Issues for Policy Makers" *Dynamics of Development,* op. cit. p 234

(16) *Op. cit.* p. 85

(17) Don Adam, 'Pitfalls and Priorities in Education' Dynamics of Development, *op, cit.* p. 247

(18) Harbison and Myers, *op. cit.* p. 121

(19) K. G. Saiyidain, *Universities and the Life of the Mind*, (Bombay 1965) p. 168.

(20) *Op. cit.* pp. 176-177

(21) *Op. cit.* p. 86